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Reference Code:	2016/52/27
Creation Dates:	21 July 1986
Extent and medium:	13 pages
Creator(s):	Department of the Taoiseach
Accession Conditions:	Open
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S19015 - S19030

Private Transcript of Official Unionist Party Press Conference

21 July 1986

Rev. Martin Smyth

I wanted to speak first for of all a short time about personnel investment in job opportunities. We've had the news there at the end of the week that there is a possibility of chaos in Harland's. That in itself is understandable because of the question of filling in employment until such times as the orders which have been received have come forward. But having said that I regret that there are those within Great Britain particularly, who at this time continue to try to score points off Harland's because of Harland's success in modernising its whole approach. Last week, for example, I understand, that Labour Politicians were saying that Harland's was being subsidised to such an extent that their yards were not able to compete. The reality is that for 20 years their yards were being subsidised by Defence contracts which Harland's were not allowed get and they only came to Harland's at a time of the Falkland's conflict because British shipyards were not able to supply and provide on the deadlines required. It was as a result of the obvious changes in structure and in management in Harland's that they ultimately won the defence contract last year. But all of those 20 years Harland's had to compete in the international market for decreasing maritime fleet and I think that we should be paying credit to the men and the management there.

But the other aspect of the thing that gives me great concern is last week I received a note from the board of management letting me know about the present announcement that they were going to make about the new investments in the factory in Belfast. Over the years we've kept in touch with them at various levels. I made no statement because of the sensitivity of politicians constantly making comments in investments and employment opportunities here. Nonetheless I was horrified both to read in one of the papers, an attack upon the situation in

Fords and to discover again that the paper published that statement without consulting either management or unions representing the workforce in the factory. And again it is a blatant falsehood. But before dealing with that blatant falsehood, I want to put on record that I have visited factories in Great Britain, in the United States of America and elsewhere in the world where the national colours have been displayed in the factory, on the workfloor, I've actually seen pictures of State leaders in Boardrooms and also on the shop floor and people get on with their work without any difficulty, but here, because we have a disaffected minority, who refuse to recognise themselves as British people, it is an offence in their eyes if the national colours are displayed. I repudiate such an attitude, but having said that, I reject emphatically, the implication of a spokesperson ^[misgendered] who for the SDLP last week, that there is an attempt by the displaying of emblems to intimidate a minority of people in the Fords factory in West Belfast. Subsequently, I did see two reports in the paper denying the allegation of the SDLP spokesman, I saw an oblique reference from the SDLP, but the tragedy that you ladies and gentlemen of the media will know better than I do, is that there will be those who will have gladly cut the first cutting out and posted it to the United States and elsewhere and have failed to cut the second and third cuttings out. And I want to put on record, that rather than the alleged intimidation of nationalists, people in that factory there has been the intimidation of British people doing their daily work. Two men were threatened and had to leave their jobs in that factory. Another person was murdered at the lane leading to the factory and more significantly enough to confirm what I'm saying about the national colours rather than the sheer religious or political complexities of the situation, an RUC part-time member of the UDR who worked in that factory was murdered and yet we have this blatant playing with the jobs of our people by representatives of the SDLP.

Can I turn to something which is, I am sure giving you all interest and concern depending on the depth of approach to it, that is the duet of this morning of Peter Barry and Garreth FitzGerald, who were without naming anything specifically, they imply that undertakings were given to them concerning parades. I will be intersted to discover in the end who gave such undertakings but they certainly have revealed that their understanding of the Anglo-Irish Agreement is that they have a say in the internal affairs of Northern Ireland which at least in a most generous understanding of it is a breach of the sovereignty of the Kingdom. While it has become an acceptable part of international relationships, that people may make overtures to government about what they think to be something wrong in their contry we have the clear example of the boycott on the Commonwealth Games seeking to use sports to put pressure upon the British Government to take steps on the internal affairs of South Africa.

While we see that development we also recognise that the Anglo-Irish Accord is something more significant than those who have supported it hitherto have been prepared to acknowledge and here we have those from the Republic who have majoured for years in interferring in the running of the Gardai. Living their lives, judging their neighbours and wanting now to have a direct political input into the running of the RUC. And if there was any grounds for such complaint when the RUC was directly answerable to a Stormont administration with a Northern Ireland Minister for Home Affairs, with the advent of the police authority with the advent of the ^{complaint} complacent boards and other agencies there has been a clear demarkation of the line of police control and responsibility of the Chief Constable and the input of politicians.

I think it was right when Harold McClusker spoke last weekend said that the decision on the parades in Portadown taken this year on operational grounds, but obviously that which lay behind the concern about the parade this year stemming from last

year, was based on more than a grain of truth. For Barry now, has confirmed that obviously someone gave a commitment and it is because of that sort of committment we are in the mess that we are in Northern Ireland where policemen are no longer recognised as doing their police job, in an extremely difficult and sensitive situation but actually answering to the demands of politicians from the Republic of Ireland. Accordingly we repudiated, we do recognise of course that it has been part of the structure of Garreth FitzGerald's philosophy to try to ban Orange Parades, he did say to a friend some time ago that if we had them banned for three years we could have a complete change of the situation in Northern Ireland. He of course represents a State in which he with his Foreign Secretary, Director of the Referendum Campaign was not able to protect the civil rights and the human rights of the minority in his own State. And his people have no intention of protecting such rights, but now we have the blatant manifestation of the desire to interfere in the civil rights and the human rights of the people in Northern Ireland and we repudiate^{e it} completely.

Ken as our security spokesperson is present with us to deal specifically with some of the more sensitive and tragic manifestations of the security situation.

Ken Maginness

Ladies and Gentlemen, continuing on from what Martin has said in relation to Portadown, I think it is now time that we look very carefully at the attitude of Peter Barry to what is happening in Northern Ireland and decide whether or not as I believe he is more guilty of sectarianism than the people living in this province. His attitude over the past few months has been to press to have polarisation within the community almost institutionalised. That can be seen in his interference in the Portadown situation. Now if Ulster's rulers, if the Northern Ireland Office Ministers in other words are inclined to try to compromise with Peter Barry's directives, then they have better consider what type of

province we're going to finish with very shortly. Instead of us being able to make effort to bridge the sectarian divide we're going to find the two communities pushed farther and farther apart and that sadly has already happened in parts of Belfast where you know walls are being built to keep people apart. But so far, even after 17 years of slaughter, we haven't had that in the rural areas. Now it would appear that Peter Barry wants to institutionalise certain areas within the province within the rural areas of the province, as no-go areas except for the Catholic community. Now that is totally unacceptable to me. Can I say that I have always been an advocate of the right for traditional parades and I don't care whether they ^{are} Orange parades or parades by the Ancient Order of Hibernians or Nationals ^{for Ulsters} or the ~~Apprentice~~ ^{Boys} to carry on with their traditional parades with the dignity which we saw them display in the years up until 1985. It was the direct interference of the Chief Constable initially which broke the mould and I think that we've got to be unequivocal in our condemnation of that irrespective of which side is victimised by that type of directive and we've certainly got to examine as I said the totally sectarian nature of Peter Barry's pronouncements over the last month. That brings me of course to the horrific murders in North Belfast, can I say that both Martin and I totally support the stand taken by the MP for the area, Cecil Walker in condemning these murders. We consider the Protestant Action Force, the resurgence of the Protestant Action Force, as totally unacceptable to any believing christian and any true Protestant. It's as I said early today, the anathemasis of our Protestant faith to indulge in sectarian murders. We can only appeal as we've done in the past to these sectarian murderers to stop and to the community in which they ^{are} temporarily being sheltered to give them up to the forces of law and order. We can't compromise on that but we recognise that the IRA have not been given up by the community in which they shelter, we know that well, I know that in Co. Fermanagh only 2 of about 90 IRA murders have been solved. But nonetheless, it's not the Protestant way and I choose my words

carefully, it is not the Protestant way and irrespective of the hatred, the anger, or indeed the despair that there is within the community, we will not give any support to people behaving in the way that they have in North Belfast. I hope I make myself clear in that and I hope that I will not be accused of trying to excuse the murders when I say that they have been provoked by the Sectarian nature of Peter Barry's statements over the past month and by the sneering attitude of Northern Ireland Office Ministers to the political and constitutional protest which the majority community have mounted against the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

But I do say that, nonetheless because while Martin and myself and my colleagues are being told that we must show responsibility, we're all too eager if we were allowed to display that responsibility. It does not, it's not just something which should be a feature of Unionist politics, it's also something which should be a feature of politics from the Tory Party, from the Northern Ireland Office, from the minority Political leaders in this community and indeed by those political leaders in the Irish Republic.

Jim Dougal, RTE

You say that those are being provoked by Peter Barry and the sneering attitude of Northern Ireland's Office Ministers: to what extent are they being provoked by the intemperate language of Leader and Members of your companion party the DUP?

Maginess

Well you see, the very nature of your question is I believe intended to provoke some sort of animosity between the two parties. We have not (interruptions) well, I'm going to give you an answer. But I think we should be concentrating on the fact that this party has been unequivocal at all times in relation to violence and we have not associated with anyone, who has as you say, provoked violence in relation to that so called provocation. That's why, that's why, that's why I'm fit

to sit here today and on behalf of my party put across the case against Protestant violence. But let me say this, as far as the Anglo-Irish Agreement is concerned it would be the strangest thing in the world if we did not seek an opposition to that specific agreement to take our friends where we find them. That is the nature of politics that has happened down the years. It will happen in years to come and we will continue to be united in our opposition to the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Dougal: RTE

I accept that, I also accept what you say, your unequivocal opposition to violence, I still will repeat my question and I ask you to what extent you think that people are provoked by the intemperate language of members of the DUP?

Maginness

I think that any intemperatelanguage of this type is regrettable. I explore all politicians to ^{detest} detest from intemperate language. At the same time, and I think I must qualify, its time that the media tried to look at the problem from the point of view of those who on the 23rd January went to the Ballot Box and got an overwhelming mandate from the Community to oppose the Anglo-Irish Agreement. If the media would meet its obligations then I would believe there would be less cause for intemperate as you call them, intemperateoutburst;

Eamon Malley Downtown Radio

I'm talking about immediate reporting. What I'm talking about are some of the ill informed articles that we read and I'm not talking so much about the immediate, the local press as I would be referring to the national press and to the press in the Irish Republic. And if you read the article in the Sunday Tribune yesterday, you will know exactly what I was speaking about.

Malley

Well what exactly are you speaking about?

Maginess

Yes, well I'm sure you are as capable of reading the Sunday Tribune as I am.

Malley

Yes, I read the Tribune, but what are you talking about?

Maginess

I'm talking about the misreporting of unionist attitudes. The one example, perhaps that sticks out most clearly is the fact that violence which occurred in Portadown has been attributed to the Orange men. I can say this, perhaps, where Martin can't because I'm not an Orange man, but the Orange men in Portadown did everything and took every possible precaution to prevent violence, to the extent that they placed themselves in danger from those who were intent on seeking violence. They have got very little credit from the national press and certainly no credit from the press in the Republic for the action they took to prevent violence on the 12th of July and on the 14th and again the same thing applies to the Black Men on the 14th of July.

Malley

Well, were they not seen bashing members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary with umbrellas in front of the world?

Maginess

I'm I'm sorry, the leadership, the leadership of the and this is, this personifies the irresponsibility of the press. If a Unionist goes out and bashes a policeman with his umbrella, mark you that dangerous implement an umbrella. If he is seen to do that then it apparently is justification to brand every single unionists or every single Orange man. But let the IRA come across and murder John McVitty one of my constituents in a tractor and you've forgotten about it in 24 hours, 48 hours at the most and you certainly do not, nor do I want you to, brand the entire community, the entire republican community, in the

Rosslea area, which at the last council by-election voted 85% for Sinn Fein. Why not, perhaps its my turn to ask the question Mr. Malley.

Alan Murray, Irish Press

But aren't you trying to wipe your hands of normally what happened in Portadown isolated incidents though they may be. The Orange order organised the march, the fighting took place after the march and in the same way you organised the campaign against the Anglo-Irish Agreement and we're now reaping the words that you ^{saw it} sold earlier this year on the streets of Northern Belfast.

Maginess

I'm sorry, but you don't listen very clearly, I'm certainly, I don't think this is particularly, I mean, this is meant to provoke, I don't think that you would suggest that I am wiping my hands of my responsibility. That's why I'm here saying what I am saying but at the same time I can understand the reaction of the media since I have criticised them this morning and they ^(save, fell?) are justified in coming back at me. But what I'm saying is that the generalisation that we find following an incident which involves the Unionist community compares most unfavourably with the attitude which was taken to the multitude of IRA murders which have occurred over the last 17 years and its time I think that if you want people like me to examine my conscience, I am willing to do so if you gentlemen and Lady are prepared to re-examine your conscience in the way you generalise and try to paint unionists as being in total irresponsible.

Martin Smyth

Can I ask you all of the media. Now I issued a statement last week. Which of you carried it? First of all at all? and secondly in its entirety in which I dealt with the apartheid that existed here and was apparently acceptable here, but we're all campaigning against in South Africa. There is such a thing

as selective reporting. It might be you don't think its important, but you can't get away from it, you have a responsibility as well in society.

(Interruptions)

I'm not blaming the press, I'm dealing with the question, no, I'm dealing with, no quite frankly.....

Alan Murray, Irish Press

The DUP had a go at us two weeks ago and it was quite a bitter exchange at the DUP Party Press Conference because of a question being answered, there was an attack on a journalist, this morning again we seem to be lectured with every respect about asking questions about real matters that are happening in the community and I don't think, I'll not speak for everybody here but I think people here believe that the Unionist party on its own is pursuing any sort of violent activity in opposition to the Anglo-Irish Agreement. But there are other politics and Dr. Daly spoke about them last week at the funeral of the young man, McConnell, and he said that certain words and deeds, now who is he referring to then?

Martin Smyth

Well it would be up to Dr. Daly to tell us because we have difficulty in getting Dr. Daly to come before us, to make his contribution in the political scene when he was given an opportunity so to do although he was able to go to the New Ireland Forum. It's up to you to ask Dr. Daly. One of the things that we object to, and you will be aware of it, that we come here Monday by Monday and we make statements which deal with the issue that you raise apart from what we want to put before you, we have'nt dodged any of the issues that you've raised. We maybe have not answered them, the way some of you at times like but subsequently during the week, perhaps even at the end of the week because something else has cropped up, again we get an honourable mention in such a way as if we, if

what we were saying on Monday was referring to something which was happening on Friday. The other aspect that we're not in business for is constantly to play the question of conflict and even this morning I heard Ken being interviewed on the media when he was unequivocal in his denunciation and immediately and again I understand the sharpness of it, that I respect that type of questioning as long as you've no objection in the answer going back. The impression was that he was justifying the violence and anybody listening to it would have realised that apart from anything else he was putting himself on the line to be a target by some of the people who disagree fundamentally with what he was saying.

Reporter (possibly Jim Cusack, Irish Times)

But don't you accept, I mean some of the things you've been saying here this morning you blame partly Peter Barry, you've been talking about the IRA, you talked about the media, I mean just exactly how much responsibility do you, are you prepared to accept?

Martin Smyth

So much responsibility, that you ^{we} fellows have not been prepared to give us credit for. Others have begun to give us credit for it and Ken referred to the Orange ^{new} and he was dealing with last weekend and Eamon immediately went back to the 6th of July. I have a suspicion that if it had been journalists been so treated on such an occasion that there would have been some journalists would have been venting their anger as well. By the way, whats happening at the ^{ka} Wapping? That's nothing relevant, sure its not?

(Interruptions)

Martin Smyth

Yes, but you're taking the point that they have acted in that situation

Reporter

I don't see any relevance at all.

Martin Smyth

Do you not?

Maginess

Well then perhaps I could broaden it a little bit. I don't really want to but just to clarify your mind on this. We have always got with a large crowd the possibility of violence. We saw on Saturday, was it Saturday night or was it Friday night I don't remember it at Wembley. We see it at football matches. We see it at political gatherings and non-political gatherings on the mainland. When that happens there is no desire and rightly so to condemn an entire community. I would be failing in my duty as a public representative and I'm now talking about duty if I didn't reflect the feelings of the majority community to the way in which its case is put across and analysed by the world's press, and by you people are part of the world's press. I think I've got the right to tell you that I'm less than satisfied on behalf of those people of the way in which generalisation and that's the only criticism I've made this morning the way generalisation are used in relation to Unionists, Protestants, members of the Orange Order, members of the majority community. Whereas we do not find that sort of generalisation in relation to those who wish the violence to continue here. I am talking to the IRA and those people with them. One area of my constituency who voted 85% in support of them.

Malley

We did hear one generalisation from Martin Smyth ^{that} ~~but~~ because of the disaffected minority they refused to recognise themselves as British. Earlier in this Press Conference, I mean, you have often said there are many Catholics who would regard themselves as part of the United

(General Interruptions)

Martin Smyth

I did'nt say, in fact if you go back to what I said, I actually referred to a Roman Catholic member of the UDR who was murdered from that factory as well. I was using specific terms because I cannot see that anything else other than a disaffected minority and not a significant number in proportionate terms.

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